LOVE *of our* BRETHREN *the Diſtinguiſhing Mark of* CHRIST'S DISCIPLES;

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SERMON,

PREACH'D before the

GOVERNORS

OF THE

WORCESTER INFIRMARY,

On the 12th of *October*, 1749.

By PHILIP SMALRIDGE, *D.D.*
Chancellor of the Dioceſe of WORCESTER.

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SERMON

LOVE

WORCESTER

By Philip Smalley

Printed at the Request of

JOHN XIII. *ver.* 35.

By this ſhall all Men know that ye are my Diſciples, if ye have LOVE ONE TO ANOTHER.

LOVE to our Brethren is by our Saviour made the diſtinguiſhing Character of a true Chriſtian. All the ſeveral Sects and Religions of Men have had their Marks by which they have been diſcriminated from each other; ſome peculiar Doctrines which they have held, or Ways of living which they have tied themſelves to, or Rites and Ceremonies which they are bound ſtrictly to obſerve; but the Note of Diſtinction which our Saviour pitched upon by which his Diſciples ſhould be known from all other Profeſſions and Religions, was a more exalted and eminent Degree of Brotherly Love and Affection to each other.

For ſince even the unenlighten'd Heathen found themſelves by the Dictates of their own Reaſon

oblig'd to be loving and charitable to one another; ſince the *Jews* were taught by the expreſs Revelation of God to give evident Teſtimonies of their Love to each other, ſuitably to the ſeveral Occaſions and Wants of their Brethren; this Love of Chriſtians to Chriſtians could not be a diſtinguiſhing Mark of them who were Chriſt's Diſciples, from them who were not, unleſs their Love exceeded the Love of others, expreſt itſelf in more frequent and ſignificant Acts of Charity; unleſs it was greater in the Extent of it; took in a larger Compaſs of Objects to employ itſelf upon; was more perfect in the Degrees of it; was free from thoſe Defects which leſſen'd and impair'd the Charity of others; was built upon ſurer and better Principles; and, in ſhort, had ſomething proper and peculiar to itſelf, ſomething which all other Religions fell ſhort of, and which was reſerv'd to be the eſpecial Character of thoſe who were call'd by the Name of Chriſt.

For tho' there are other Signs by which Chriſtians ſtand diſtinguiſh'd from thoſe who are Aliens to the Faith of Chriſt; tho' the Doctrines which they believe, and the Myſteries which they celebrate, and the

Rule

Rule of Faith and Worſhip which they agree in, do all of them ſerve as Diſtinctions betwixt them and others who do not profeſs the ſame Faith, obſerve the ſame holy Rites, or acknowledge the ſame Rule, yet becauſe ſome may outwardly profeſs the Faith of Chriſt, who are inwardly Unbelievers, ſome may profanely intrude upon the ſacred Myſteries of this Religion, who have no ſincere Reverence and Veneration for them; ſome may challenge a Right to the Promiſes of the Goſpel, who don't take care to conform their Lives to the Precepts of it, Chriſt has pitch'd upon this particular Duty of Love to our Brethren, as a more ſure, certain, and unerring Sign of our being truly his Diſciples, than any of thoſe other Marks by which Chriſtians uſed to be known from thoſe of another Denomination.

Now, unleſs we are willing to reſign all Pretences to the Goſpel; unleſs we are reſolv'd to renounce Chriſt and his Religion, to give up the Right we have to his Mercies by the Covenant into which we are admitted, to forfeit all the Claims and Challenges we can make upon the Title of our being Chriſtians, we ought to take care to approve ourſelves the Diſciples

of

of Chriſt by thoſe eminent Degrees of Love and Charity, which none but Chriſtians do perform, and which none but muſt perform, upon the Penalty of being eſteem'd by Chriſt, tho' they call themſelves by his Name, and own him to be their Lord, yet no Chriſtians, none of his Followers, none of his Diſciples.

Our Saviour, to ſhew his Diſciples how he would have their Love to each other exceed the Love which all other Religions exacted from their ſeveral Votaries, makes his own Love to them the Rule and Meaſure of their Love one to another. *A new Commandment*, ſays he, *I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have lov'd you, that ye alſo love one another.*

Love to our Brethren was always our Duty, before it was ſo expreſsly taught, and ſo ſtrongly enforced in the Goſpel; and therefore this Precept of Chriſt, ſo far as it barely oblig'd them to love each other, was not *a new Commandment*: But the Meaſure and Proportion of Love which is here preſcrib'd, was never before carried to ſuch an Height. Such a Pattern and Example of Love was never ſet, much leſs was it ever

ever receiv'd of Men, that their Love ſhould riſe to ſo high a Pitch; and therefore this Precept, as it requir'd ſuch a Degree and Eminence of Love to each other, was, as Chriſt calls it, *a new Commandment.*

It is indeed a Commandment never before given, but which may ſeem now to be given in vain, ſince it is not poſſible that human Nature, tho' never ſo much aſſiſted with Divine Grace, ſhould fully and rigorouſly obſerve it. For can Men poſſibly in their Practice equal that Love of Chriſt, which they can't ſo much as form a juſt Notion of? For who is able to take the Dimenſions of that Love which is unmeaſurable? *Who is able to comprehend what is the Breadth and Length, and Depth, and Height, and to know the Love of Chriſt which paſſeth Knowledge?* And if we can't by the narrow Powers of our ſhallow Underſtandings comprehend this Love, can we pretend to rival it, to make it the Model and Copy of our Love to each other, and to proportion our Love to the Love of Chriſt, which we profeſs to be infinite, and therefore to bear no Proportion to our Love, which in its greateſt Exaltations and Over-flowings muſt ſtill admit of ſuch Bounds, which when largeſt are ſtill very narrow ones.

But

But tho' we can never arrive at this Height in our Love to our Brethren, yet we muſt go the utmoſt Length we can: Tho' we can't love our Brother in the Degree that Chriſt lov'd us, yet we muſt love him to the utmoſt of our Capacities; tho' we can't equal Chriſt, yet we muſt imitate him; tho' we can't come to the Meaſure which is here ſet us, yet we muſt go as far as we are able, and think that we ſtill fall ſhort of Perfection; tho' we can't expreſs our Love to our Brethren in all the ſame Inſtances in which Chriſt expreſt his Love to us; and even in thoſe Acts of Love in which we do imitate him, can't arrive at the ſame Degrees, yet our Love muſt as far as poſſible be of the ſame Kind as his; muſt take in the ſame Objects as his did; muſt be conſtant as his was; muſt be not caſual, not perfunctory, but ſuch as ſhews us careful to do his Work, as he was aſſiduous to do the Work of his Father; muſt have ſome Reſemblance to his Love for us, tho' it can't arrive to an Equality with it.

We can't beſtow Bleſſings of that exceeding Value which he did; but what we can, that we ought to do, out of that Abundance (be it greater or leſs) with

with which God hath bleſt us: We can't ſtoop ſo low, as he did, who left the Glories of his *Father*, emptied himſelf, as it were, of his own *Divinity*, and ſubmitted to all the Frailties of our Nature, that he might ſupply our *Neceſſities*, relieve our *Wants*, and enrich us with the Treaſures of *Heaven*; but we being placed by his gracious Providence above the *ordinary* Level, may imitate his Condeſcenſion in regarding the Condition of thoſe *below* us, in vouchſafing them our Aid and Aſſiſtance, and in reſcuing them from Miſery by a ſeaſonable and well-placed Relief. We cannot, as he did, by a *miraculous* Power give Eyes to the Blind, Feet to the Lame, Health to the Sick; but we may, by our Advice, by our Conſolation, and eſpecially by laying hold of ſuch a noble Opportunity as this preſent Solemnity affords us of enabling them to purſue the proper Method of Recovery, contribute to their Amendment; or, at leaſt, to their more comfortable Support under theſe Calamities.

If we are truly Chriſt's Diſciples, our Love of Him our great Maſter, will be unlimited, extenſive, and perſevering; and we ſhall readily embrace every Oc-

caſion of ſhewing forth that Love, in Acts of Charity and Beneficence towards our Chriſtian Brethren. Our Bleſſed Saviour has been pleaſed to appoint the Poor his Subſtitutes and Proxies to receive at our Hands thoſe Offices of Humanity, which, when paid to them, he will graciouſly accept, and liberally reward, as if done to his own Perſon. It is true, that whilſt he was here upon Earth, he obſerv'd to his Diſciples that *the Poor they had always with them, but him they had not always*; and yet in the Conſtruction of his infinite Goodneſs, whilſt the Poor are with us, He is with us alſo, ſince whatever Acts of Charity are done or denied to the Poor, the ſame are done or denied to Chriſt himſelf. Thoſe, with whom our Saviour dwelt in the Fleſh; thoſe, who liv'd and convers'd with Him, had not more frequent or more proper Opportunities of teſtifying their Duty and Affection in all Acts of obſequious Love towards him than we have: We may give him Meat, when hungred, and drink, when thirſty; we may take him in when a Stranger, and cloath him when naked; we may come unto him when in Priſon, and viſit him when in Sickneſs; Chriſt preſents himſelf to us under all

all theſe Conditions and Circumſtances; for whereſoever is the Hungry or the Thirſty, the Stranger or the Naked, the Sick or the Priſoner, there, to all the Intents and Purpoſes of Love towards Him is our Lord and Chriſt; ſince whatſoever of this Kind is done to any of the leaſt of theſe that are his Brethren, He, out of his tranſcendent Goodneſs, interprets and accepts as done unto himſelf.

Let him therefore who refuſes to feed the Hungry, and give Drink to the Thirſty, remember, that by omitting theſe Acts of Love and Compaſſion to his poor Brother he forfeits the Title of being Chriſt's Diſciple, he denies an Alms to his Saviour: Let him, who neglects to take in the Stranger, and to cloath the Naked, think with himſelf that he denies Reception to his Lord, and Cloathing to his Redeemer. He who neglects to viſit the Priſoner, and to miniſter to the Sick, let him conſider that he is unmindful of his Bonds, who releas'd him from the everlaſting Chains of Death; nor is he touch'd with the Sickneſs of him *who heal'd all his Infirmities.*

How aſtoniſh'd will the hard-hearted and uncharitable Chriſtian be at the laſt great and terrible Day, when he ſhall hear himſelf charg'd before God and his holy Angels, and the general Aſſembly of all the People of the Earth, of all Ages, Tongues, and Nations, with having been guilty of inhumane Treatment; and of an Heart void of all Love and Affection, all Tenderneſs and Compaſſion towards his Lord and Saviour? How apt will he be to plead his Innocence, and to deny the Charge, ſaying, *When ſaw I thee an hungred or athirſt, or Stranger, or naked, or ſick, or in Priſon, and did not miniſter unto thee?* And how overwhelm'd with Confuſion and Deſpair will he then appear, when his Mouth ſhall be ſtopp'd with that peremptory Anſwer of our Lord — *Verily I ſay unto you, Inaſmuch as ye did it not to one of the leaſt of theſe, ye did it not to me.* With what Horror, with what Amazement, with what Trembling will he then be ſeized, when he ſhall find himſelf, for want of Bowels towards his poor afflicted Brethren, placed on Chriſt's Left Hand, among the Unbelieving and Abominable, and Murderers, and Whore-mongers, and Idolaters, and Sorcerers, and other open Enemies of God

God and Chriſt; and ſhall, with them, hear that dreadful Sentence of a provok'd Judge—*Depart from me, ye Curſed, into everlaſting Fire.*—Then ſhall it be too late to relent, when the irreverſible Doom is paſt; and too late to cry for that Mercy, which he himſelf never ſhew'd at the loudeſt Cries, and Sighs, and Groans of the Diſtreſſed.

But, Beloved, we are perſuaded better Things of You, and Things that accompany Salvation, though we thus ſpeak. Your repeated Attendance on this Solemnity, your ready Concurrence in this noble Work of Charity and Benevolence, ſufficiently ſhew that we have no Need to ſet the Terrors of the Lord in Array before you, in order to excite in your Breaſts that Love and Compaſſion towards your diſtreſs'd Brethren, which are the diſtinguiſhing Marks of Chriſt's Diſciples.

To generous Souls, the having been already exercis'd in Works of Mercy and Charity, is a ſtrong Incitement to perſevere, and to abound ſtill more and more in them. Of this we have hitherto had, and

doubt

doubt not but we ſtill ſhall have a plain and demonſtrative Proof, which we to our great Joy ſee before our Eyes, and which the Poor of this County, under the preſſing Calamity of Sickneſs, do to their exceeding Comfort taſte and feel, in the ſtated Subſcriptions that have been made, and the voluntary Contributions that have been given for the firſt Eſtabliſhment and continual Support of the INFIRMARY which has been ſet up in this Place.

That it has been hitherto with great Expence maintain'd, that the ſame Hands have been again and again widely open'd towards the Maintenance thereof, is ſo far from giving us any Reaſon to apprehend that your Bounty will for the Time to come be diminiſh'd, that we cannot but look upon your paſt Charity as a ſure Pledge of your Continuance in Well-doing: From what has been already done in Behalf of thoſe miſerable Objects for whoſe Sake we are here aſſembled, we may venture to make happy Preſages of what will go on ſtill to be done for promoting and advancing the ſame good Work: Thoſe who have planted this Nurſery, and by whoſe Care and Cultivating

vating it has hitherto thriven, will aſſuredly ſtill go on to water it; from their Charity, as from a perpetual Spring, freſh Streams will conſtantly iſſue forth for its Nouriſhment and Refreſhment, into which when thoſe Channels alſo ſhall flow, which are fed from other occaſional Recruits, *the Rivers of the Flood thereof ſhall make glad the City of God.*

How great a Diſcouragement would it be to all good Chriſtians, what Matter of Triumph to the Enemies of God and of Godlineſs, if a Deſign ſo well laid, and ſo far promoted, as this has been, ſhould, through the Want of additional Supplies, after all that has been done, at laſt miſcarry? Would not the Adverſaries of Religion upon ſuch an Occaſion as this load you with Reproaches, and, in an inſulting Manner, ſay, *Theſe Men began to build, and are not able to finiſh!* But we hope their Mouths will be ſtopped by the liberal Supplies that ſhall now be given by godly and charitable Perſons towards the Support and carrying on of this good Work. We hope that by extending your Compaſſion to thoſe who now call for your Aſſiſtance, you will ſhew yourſelves to be ſtrongly

actuated

actuated by that Love to your Brethren, which is so strictly enjoin'd in the Gospel of Christ, and so powerfully recommended by the Example of our God and Master; that you may have a Title to his Mercies by the Covenant into which you are admitted, and may have a Claim to that unspeakable Happiness, which will be the Reward of all the true Disciples of Jesus Christ:

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour, Adoration and Praise, now and for evermore.

The END.